

CORA NW TOWNHOME DESIGN

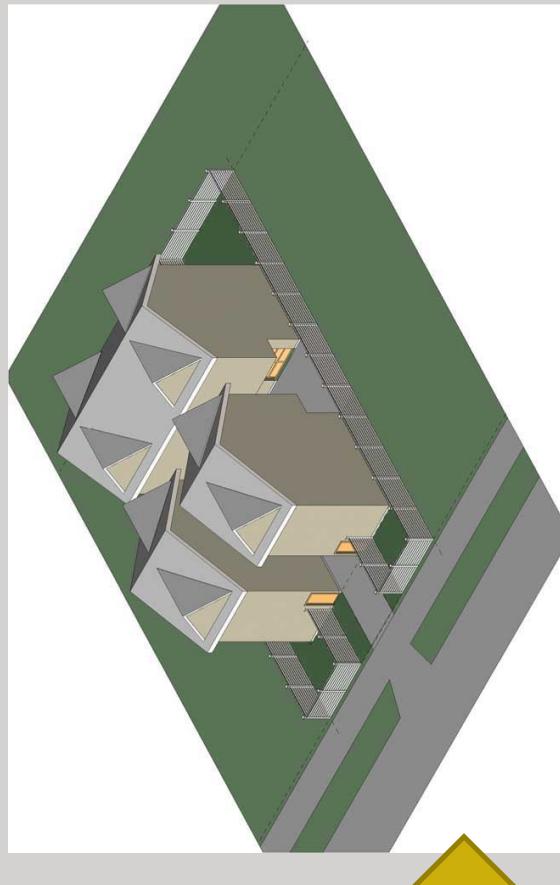
ANAYLSIS OF THE PROPOSED MULTI-FAMILY UPDATE
SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL BRIEF
APRIL 2009

THE PROBLEM

We don't design our MF housing.

We stamp it out in a cookie cutter fashion.

Using a very bad cookie cutter.



GRADING THE MULTI-FAMILY UPDATE

MAJOR IMPROVEMENTS

Floor-Area-Ratio

Flexible Setbacks

Common Open Space

Administrative Design Review



NEEDS MORE WORK

Density Limits in LDT, L1, L2

FAR and Parking

Height Limits and Roof Form

Design Standards

Public Process

ADR Oversight



Density Limits

Issue: Density limits are retained in LDT, L1, and L2 zones.

Problem: Density limits dictate the size and cost of housing units. If density limits are retained, large townhomes will continue to be the only type of housing that will be built in these zones.



Solution: Remove density limits in LDT, L1, and L2 zones

Benefits: Removing density limits encourages a mix of different housing types in these zones and enables the creation of smaller, more affordable units.

FAR and Parking

Issue: A code that takes a flexible approach to parking solutions is essential to creating well planned housing and open space. In the current version of the MFU, there is a narrow FAR exception for partially underground parking. This is the right idea, but the exception is too narrow to cover many topographic conditions.

Problem: Putting a lid over the parking area is one of the best ways to provide usable open space for the project. Counting the lid as FAR penalizes behavior we should be trying to encourage.



Solution: Make parking that is covered by usable open space exempt from FAR or eligible for an FAR departure. (FAR is currently classified as a non-departable standard)

Benefits: Parking lids will reduce the visual impact of parking areas and dramatically increase the amount of usable open space.



Good parking solutions facilitate good open space solutions.



This project would lose 1/5 of its development potential if the parking lid was counted as FAR.

Would this be a better project without the lid?

Height Limits & Roof Form

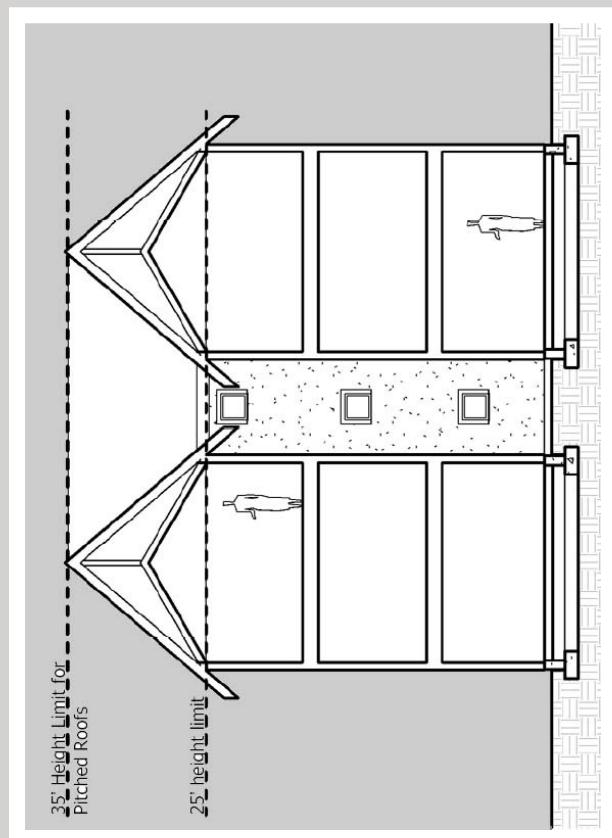
Issue: One reason various townhouses are so much alike is that height limit exceptions have historically been biased in favor of gabled roof forms. The code contains a strong bias against other roof forms.

Problems:

- The bias toward steeply pitched gabled roof forms creates buildings that are taller than necessary. In many instances, flat roofs or low slope shed roofs reduce the overall height of the building and are the better solution for preserving solar access and view corridors for adjacent properties.
 - The height limits for roofs are calculated differently for sheds and gables. In addition to being capricious, this distinction also encourages designers to clip the overhangs off shed roofs.
- Since height limits are by definition non-departable, there is no flexibility built into the system.



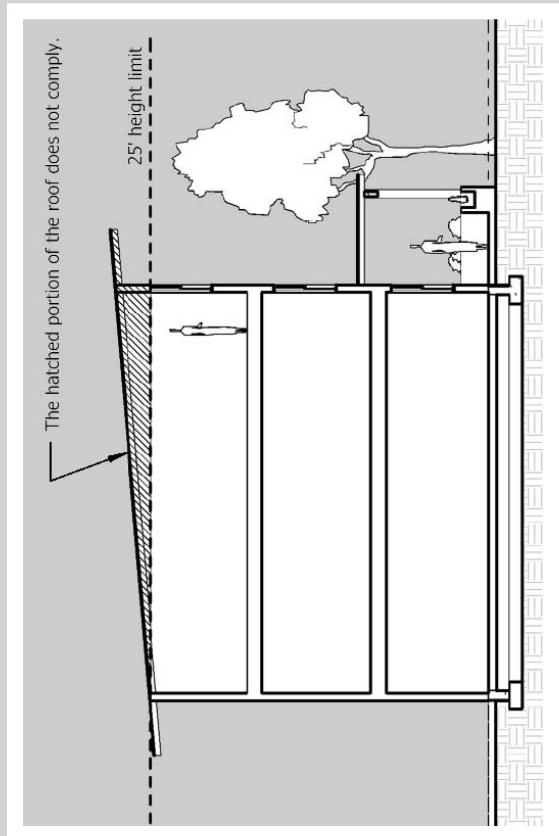
Gable roofs with a roof pitch of 6:12 or greater get a 10' height bonus.



Shed roofs get no height bonus.

This version of the building is several feet lower than the previous version, yet it cannot be built under the current code.

Why do we have a code that precludes these building forms?



Which version of the building is lower scale?

Which version blocks less of it's neighbors views?

Which version block less of it's neighbors sunlight?

Solutions:

- Make the height limit definition consistent across all roof types. Measure the height of roofs at the perimeter of the building from the top of the wall. Exempt all overhangs.
- Make a modest height exception for shed roofs. Allowing them half the height exception of a gabled roof would be adequate while still preventing over-scaled facades on the high side of the roof, or;
- Make the height zone between 25' and 30' eligible for departures. This allows nothing outright but provides the flexibility for designers to make the argument that a particular roof form is a good solution for a particular project.

Benefits:

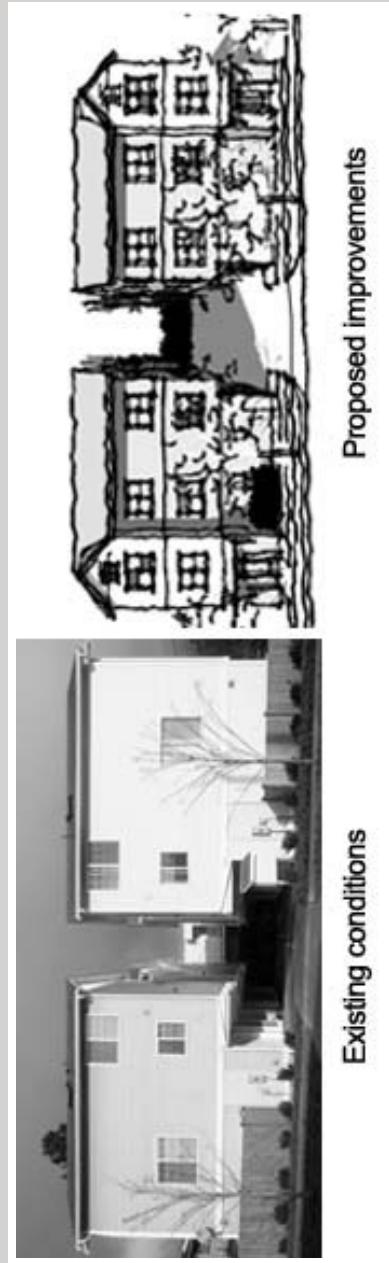
A code that fairly accommodates a variety of roof forms allows architects to design the roof that is appropriate for the building, instead of choosing the form that games the zoning code most successfully.

Development Standards

Issue: The new development standards were originally created to address some common complaints about the four-pack building type. Now that mandatory ADR has been introduced into the MFU, these standards are no longer necessary.

Problem: By incorporating these new design standards we create an expectation that compliance with them means that a design proposal should be approved. This a) sets the bar too low, and; b) creates a cookie cutter template for developers to replicate from building to building. This, in turn undermines the very premise of Design Review - that a building should be designed with it's particular site in mind.

Solution: Remove the new development standards from the MFU. They are more than covered by the design review guidelines.



Benefits: Less dissonance between the letter of the law & the intent of Design Review makes for a DR program with more integrity.

Public Process:

Design Review Oversight:

Problem:

- If the public is to see the ADR as a process that serves the public interest, the comment process must be run more effectively and openly than it has in the past.

Problems:

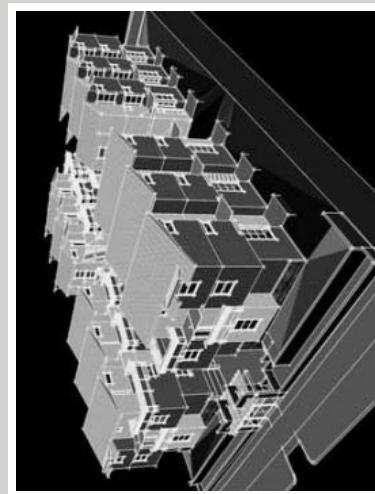
- In order to help the administrative design review staff make consistent, thoughtful decisions that further the intent of the design review guidelines, there should be periodic review of the work of the staff.

Solutions:

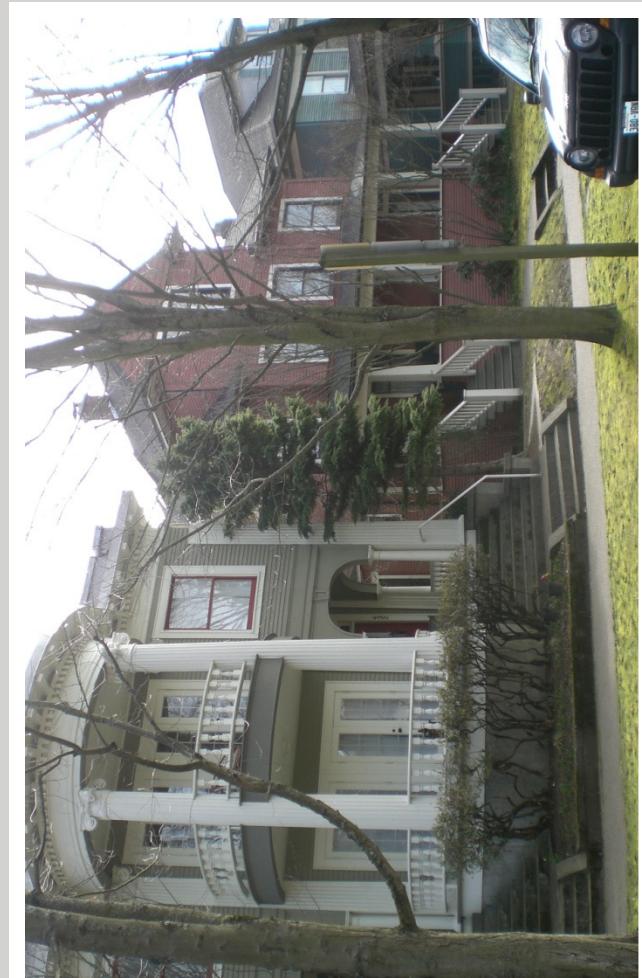
- Public notices should include useful illustrative information about the project.
- PDF copies of all proposals should be readily accessible in a convenient searchable database.

Possible Solutions:

- Perhaps the community design review boards could serve an oversight function, or an additional community design review board could be created to oversee the program.
- Some outreach on the part of DPD to help the public understand the distinction between effective & ineffective public comment could be helpful.



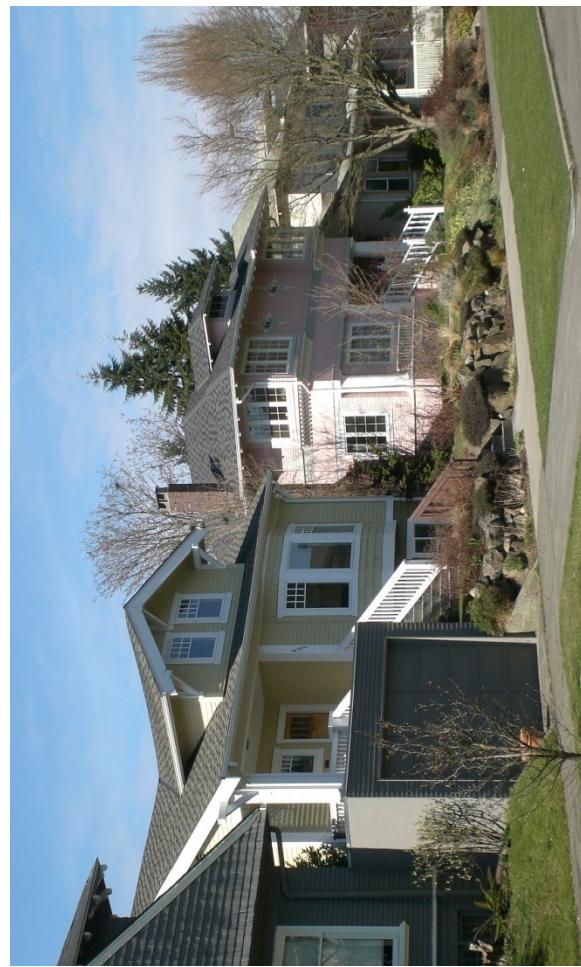
Multi-family code is designed to preserve the essential character of Seattle, namely that it is a city of single-family homes



Classic duplexes in Capitol Hill

SINGLE FAMILY CHARACTER

- Front and rear yard setbacks
- Ground based housing
- Gabled roof forms
- Articulated building mass



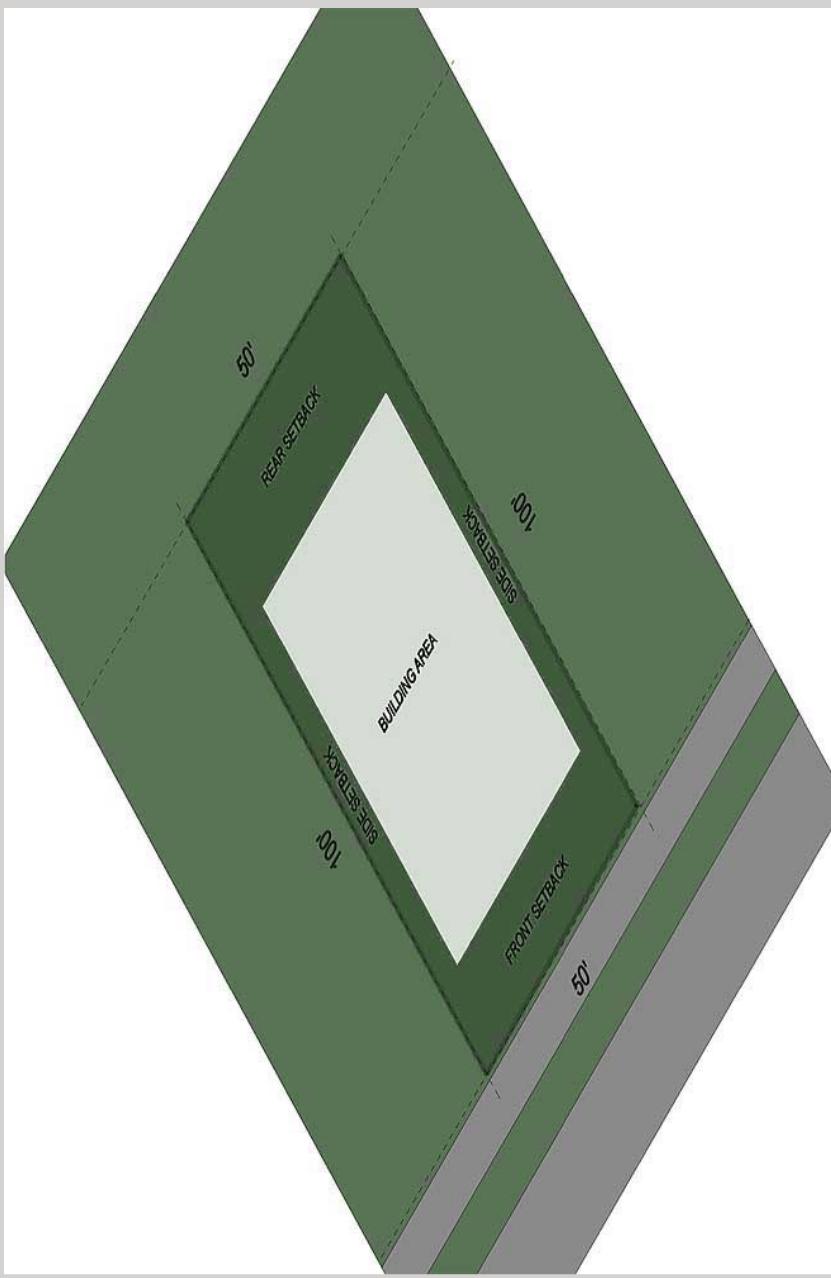
REQUIREMENTS FOR MF HOUSING

- Provide off-street parking
- Higher density to accommodate growth



RESIDENTIAL SETBACKS

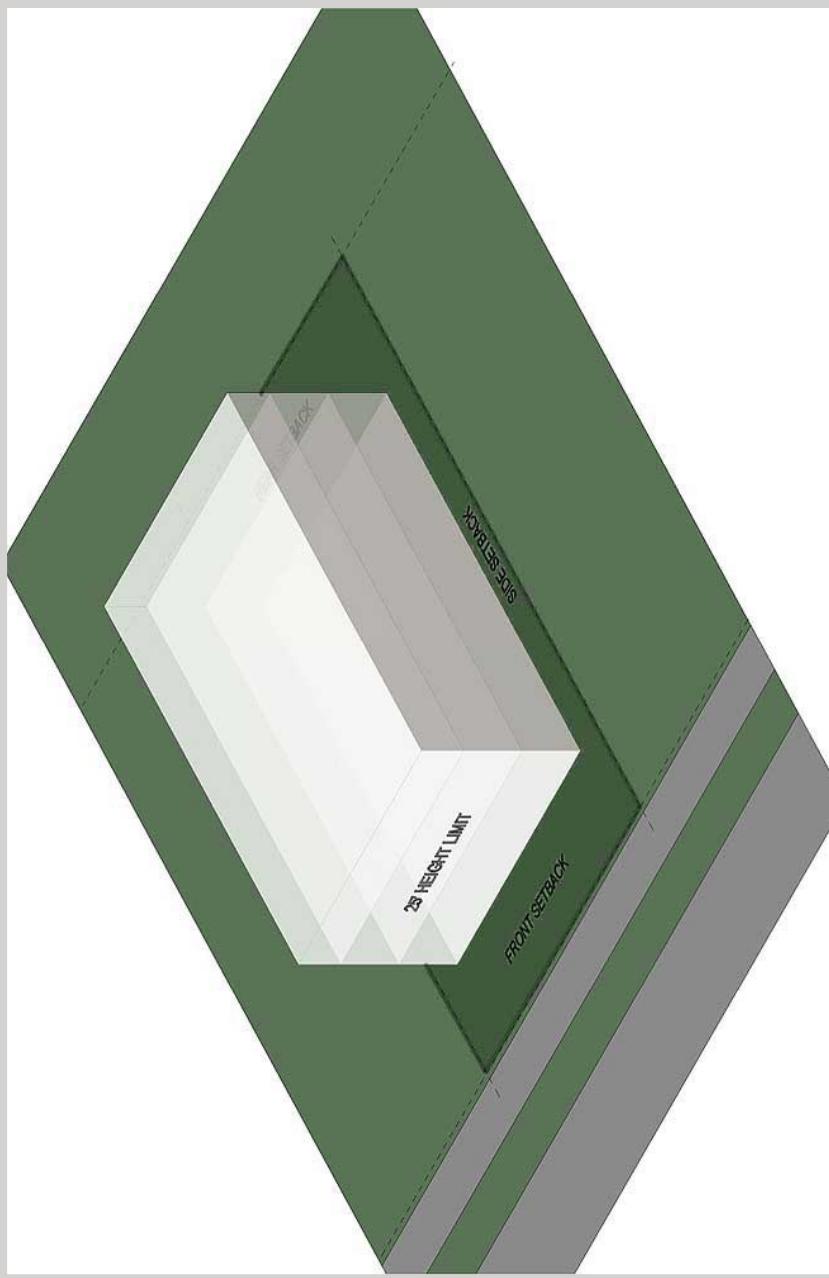
- 15 foot front setback
- 20 foot rear setback.
- 5 foot side setback
- Front & rear setbacks are created to force multi-family housing to mimic the mass and open space relationships typical of single family housing.



WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE CURRENT CODE?

HEIGHT LIMITS

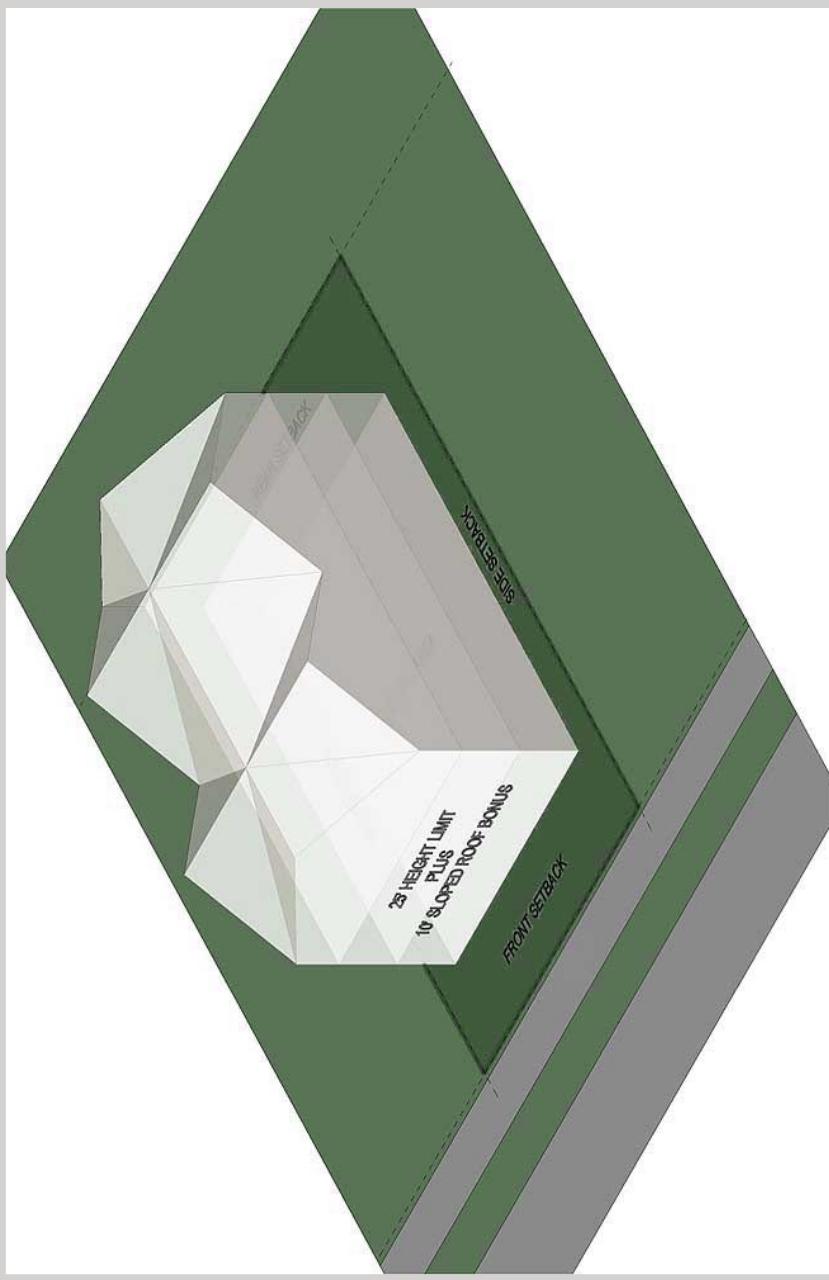
- 25 foot height limit in LDT,
L1 and L2 zones
- A full third story doesn't fit
under the height limit.



WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE CURRENT CODE?

SLOPED ROOF BONUS

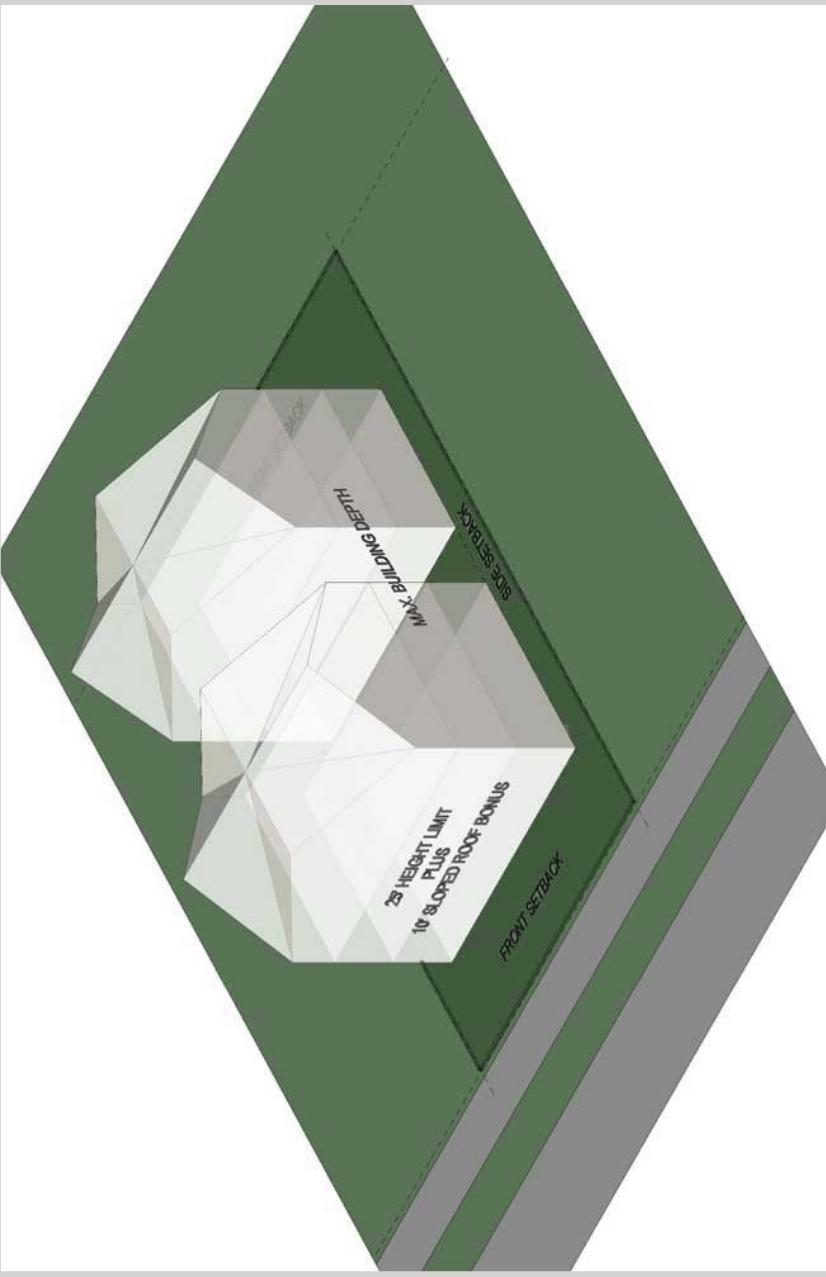
- Sloped roofs are given a 10 foot height bonus (up to 35')
- The ceiling height required for a third story forces designers to create gabled roof forms .



WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE CURRENT CODE?

MAXIMUM BUILDING SIZE

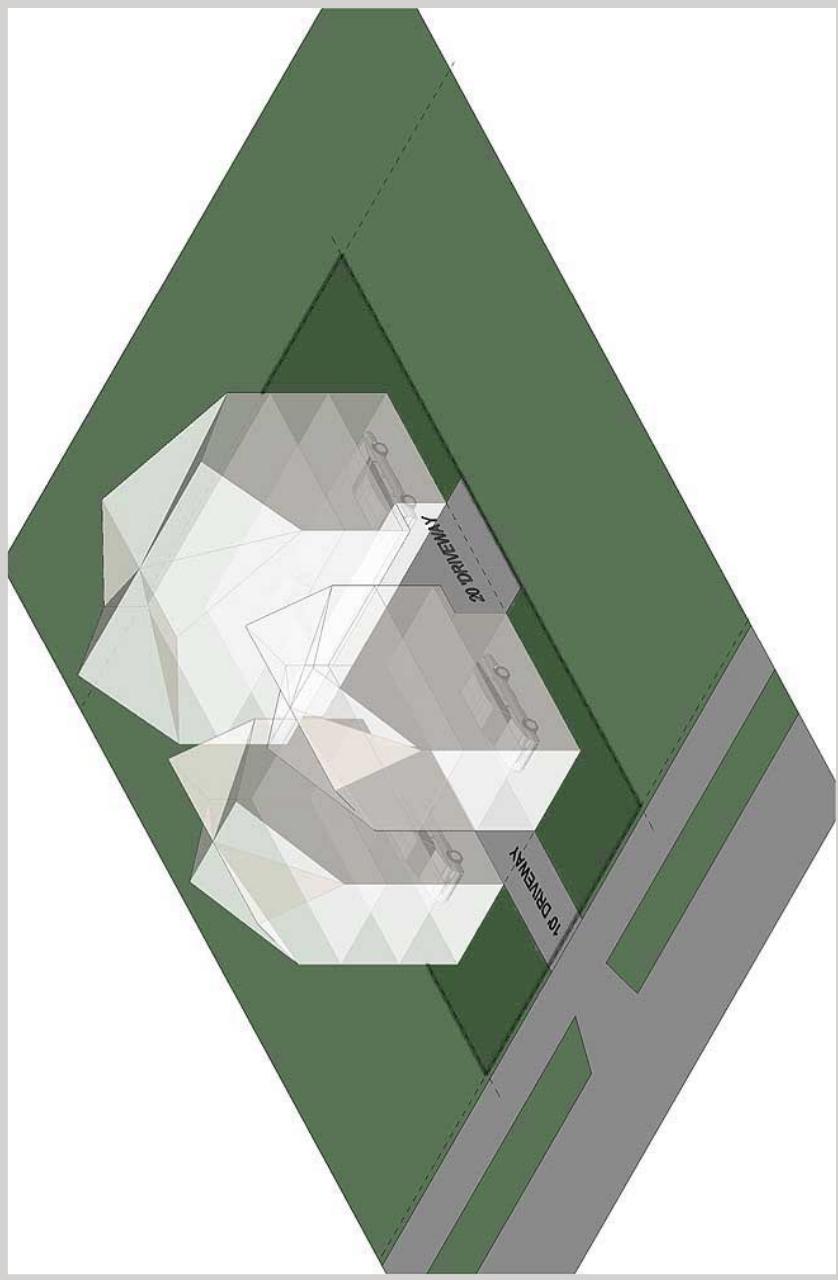
- Maximum building width and depth requirements encourage designers to break large buildings up into separate structures



WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE CURRENT CODE?

OFF-STREET PARKING

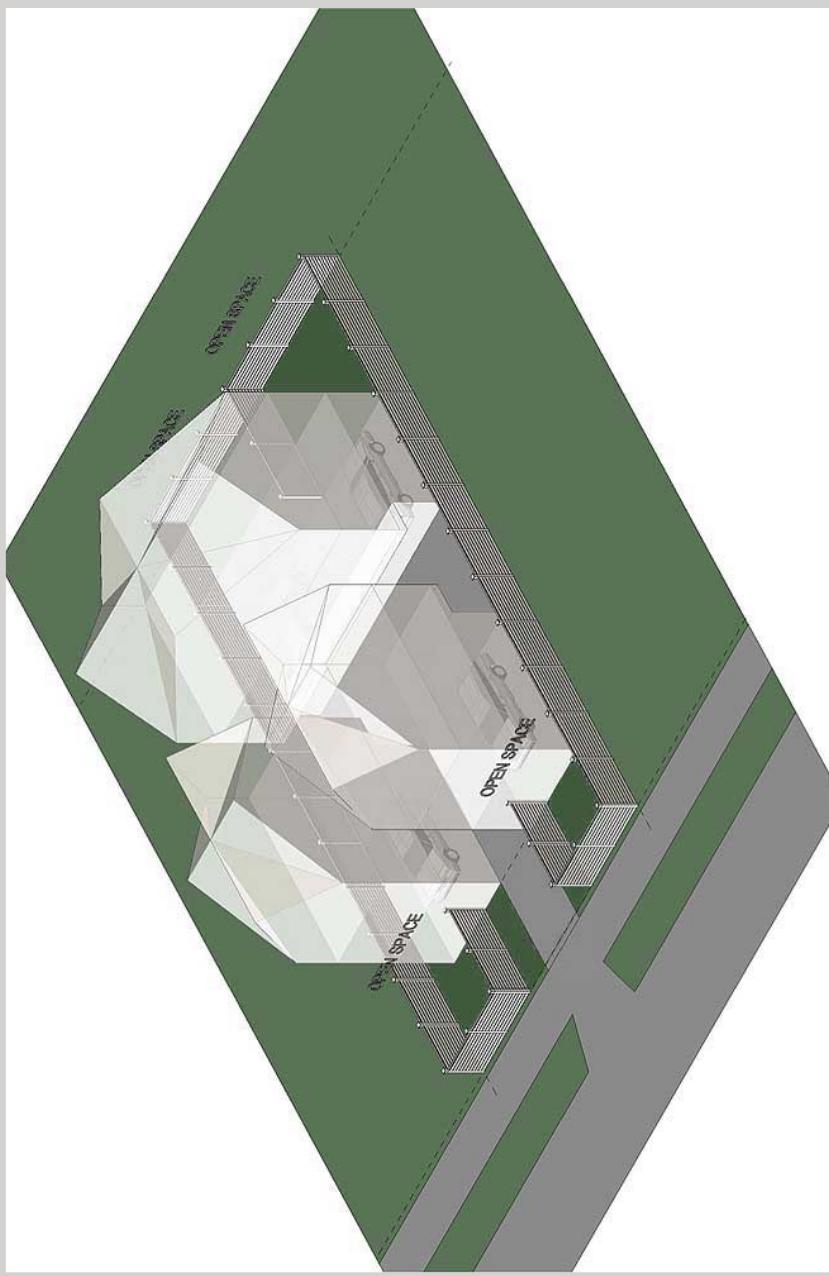
- 1 car per unit off-street parking is required
- A 20' wide driveway is carved out of the ground floor level to provide access to garages along the center aisle between the units



WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE CURRENT CODE?

OPEN SPACE

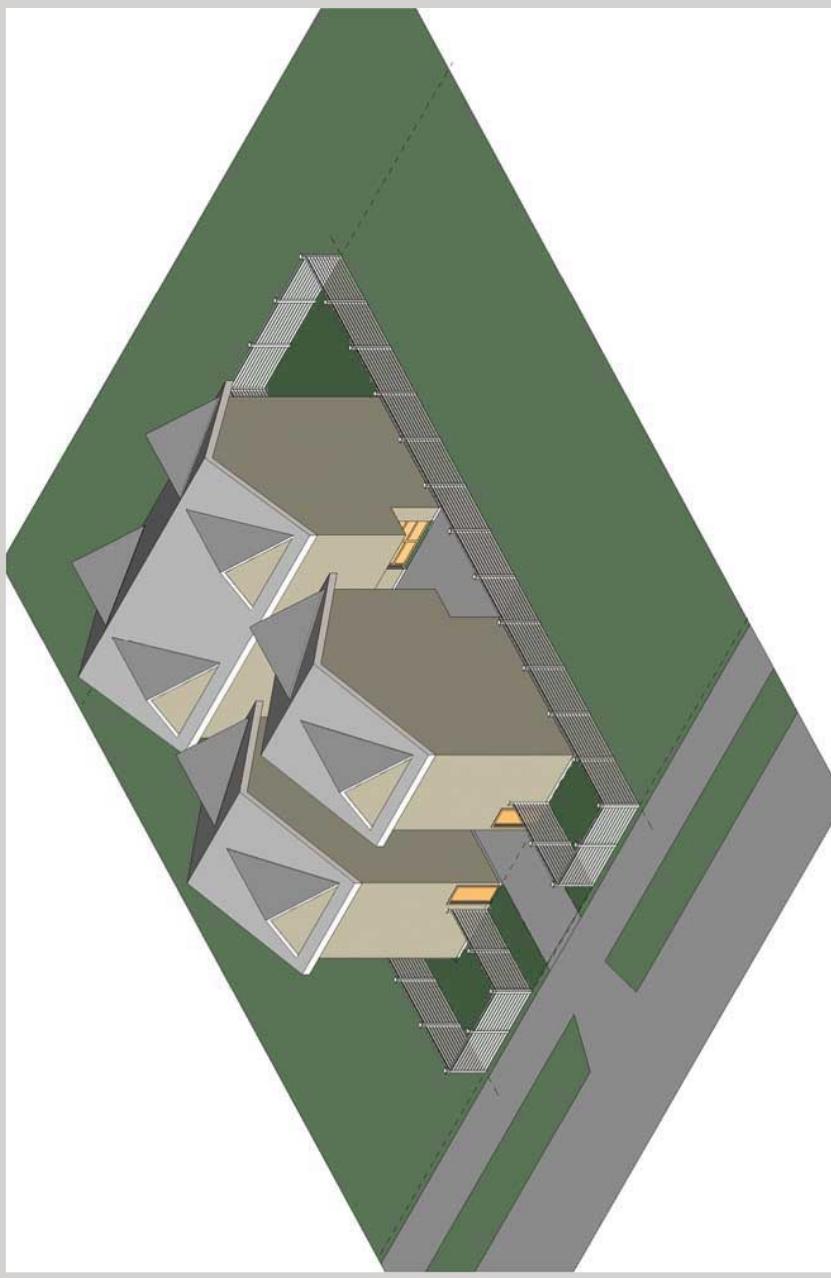
- Open space must be provided for each unit. The open space must be at ground level.
- Open space must be private – it cannot be a shared open space.



WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE CURRENT CODE?

THE FOUR-PACK

- The code was written in a highly prescriptive manner with a very specific outcome in mind – multi-family housing that felt compatible with single-family housing.
- The code prescribes an altogether different outcome, one that was completely unintentional .



WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE CURRENT CODE?

WHAT NOW?

We've created a set of incentives
whereby we don't design our housing.
We stamp it out in a cookie cutter
fashion. Using a very bad cookie
cutter.



ITS NOT ENOUGH TO SAY NO!

Growth is coming & saying you don't
want isn't a way of dealing with it.

We need a positive vision for what the
city can become.



WHAT NOW??!

There are plenty of established typologies for multi-family housing. How do we encourage people to try new ideas, build better housing, figure out what works best for our city?

